II Sysops

A bi-monthly newsletter for, and by, Apple II sysops
Issue 5   March/April 1992

Board-by-Board News
What's happening on bulletin boards around the world

The II Sysops BBS
+1 410 549 2584

We've replaced The Jixalti BBS with pro-iisysops. The anonymous logon, announced in the last issue, has changed. Now just type "guest" and you will be given limited access, including download capability. You can also send us email from just about anywhere by using the address "root@pro-iisysops.cts.com".

L&L Productions BBS
+1 702 322 5551

Steve Corlett has announced that he will no longer sell EXfer, the add-on transfer module for GBBS "Pro" systems. Corlett is also stepping down as sysop of the M.A.C.H. Gateway BBS (Metro [Omaha] Apple Computer Hobbyists). He did suggest that

somebody else might be taking over EXfer in the near future, but at the moment, EXfer is not available for sale. This would not be the first time EXfer's rights changed hands. It was originally written by Mike Gola.

Pro-Sol
+1 619 670 5379

Pro-sol BBS is now testing Pro-Line 2.0 from The Morgan Davis Group. New features include emulation support for VT-100, VT-102, VT-220, and ANSI; new transfer protocols, improved C-Shell, improved messaging system, as well as a collection of other new features.

GS Connection
+1 207 799 9080

TVD Productions is selling a GBBS add-on segment called

"Main-Mall." Main-Mall is a simulated online shopping mall, where users can browse through "stores" and purchase products. This could be perfect for the sysop who's looking for a way to get some return on their BBS investment by either renting mall space to businesses or running their own online store. Main-Mall sells for $62.95, which includes shipping.

Other news...

The release of System 6.0 for the IIgs is imminent. It was believed to be done in February, but someone found one last bug, apparently a rather serious one, so the system software was pulled back at the last minute. *II Sysops* will have GS System 6.0 available on The *II Sysops* BBS when released.

In This Issue...

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in Board-to-Board news.)

The Future Of The Apple II

By DOUG GRANZOW

For years now, dedicated Apple II users have been fretting about the future of the Apple II, complaining about a lack of support from Apple Computer, Inc., and generally spreading gloom and doom in an attempt to get popular support for their computers. If spreadng bad news about a products to make it more popular sounds paradoxical to you, you're right.

One of the most interesting (and positive) statements made about the Apple II was printed last year, on the cover of a Resource Central catalog. It read: "Since the day the Apple III (RIP) was introduced in 1980, the 'experts' have been saying the Apple II is a dead machine. If the Apple III couldn't kill it, the Lisa (RIP) or the PC Jr. (RIP) or the 128K Mac (RIP) would. Some people never learn. I think we'll see 2001 before we see the end of the Apple II."

Now, Apple has told us that there will be no new CPUs for the II line. (At some point after this announcement, Apple had put together an "Apple IIgs+," but the project was cancelled just before it was publically announced, according to Paul Statt, senior editor of *Incider/A+*.) Ignoring this "no new CPU" announcement, thousands of loyal users around the world have helped to keep the Apple II community alive despite neglect from Apple Computer. Apple clearly made no effort to promote any of the the Apple II line after the campaign promoting the release of the IIgs several years ago. Even the Apple IIgs itself was criticized for being an uninspired effort. There are no mainstream Apple II-only magazines left. (*GS+* and *A2 Central* are great, but try to find them on a newsstand.) Yet here we are, using our computers everyday, pushing performance past anyone's original expectations.

Rumors have surfaced that Apple may be looking to sell the Apple II line to a company to take it over. This, of course, brings up the question of **who** will take it over. Applied Engineering has all but abandoned the II. (Go ahead, call AE's Mac-only toll-free order line and try to order an Apple II product. I dare you.) Laser Computer would probably have little interest. (The IBM market has been receiving all of their attention lately.) Resource Central -- well, we'd probably **like** to see them take it over, but they're a relatively small company, and acquiring the II line, if they could afford it, would transform them into a completely different organization. It would be interesting to see if they could maintain their current level of outstanding customer support.

But, to be honest with ourselves, as interesting as it may sound, the Apple II series will probably not be sold by Apple Computer at any time in the forseeable future. Apple **is** doing a good job of supporting its existing user base, it's just making no effort to sell the computer.

Those of us who believe in the Apple II, then, are left to promote it ourselves. That's pretty difficult -- how can a bunch of individual users promote the growth (or at least continued existance) of the Apple II market? The solution is to organize, to form an alliance in order to do whatever is necessary to let everyone know that this computer is more than a paperweight.

Enter the Alliance International Incorporated (AII). AII was formec to raise money for the purpose of promoting the Apple II. An individual membership costs $20. AII, among other things, is currently trying to get the Apple II put on a U.S. postage stamp, to recognize it as the world's first personal computer. AII is dedicated to doing as much as it possibly can to keep the Apple II alive, but it can only do what its budget allows. The more people who join AII, the more AII can do to help.

There **are** people out there making a difference. Andy Nicholas writes ShrinkIt, Tim Meekins writes GNO, Ken Franklin writes a variety of

"Reliefware" games (the sharware fees for these games go to charities to help the homeless). John Majka put together AII. The team at Resource Central not only publishes a variety of Apple II paper and disk publications, but also organizes KansasFest each year and maintains the Apple II roundtable on GEnie. A whole team of programmers at Apple, including Dave Lyons, Matt Deatherage, and Andy Nicholas, put in a great deal of effort to bring us System 6.0.

II Sysops is currently trying to solicit interest from *The Wall Street Journal* to publish an article concerning Apple Computer's neglect of the Apple II. We'll tell them about AII. We'll give them the series of articles detailing the History of The Apple II. We'll tell them about the tremendous drop in sales the Apple II has experienced in the past five years. We'll tell them that Apple refuses to spend money advertising the II, yet pours tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars into developing new system software. We'll tell them about all of the power of the IIe and IIgs. We'll tell them about the Mac FST. Hopefully, before long, you'll see an article in *The Wall Street Journal* that just might embarrass Apple enough that they are forced to advertise the IIgs again.

Macintosh users are getting concerned about Apple's plans for the future. They are beginning to experience the same fears II users have been experiencing for the past five or six years. Many Mac users are aware of the what Apple did to the II, and they see Apple making moves to do the same to the Mac. Concern over the future of the Macintosh has been expressed in newspapers and trade journals, including *The Wall Street Journal*. Perhaps the only way for Apple to show that they won't kill the Mac the same way they did the II is to show that they **didn't** kill the II. Possibly the only effective way Apple could do this would be to encourage people to keep buying Apple II's. In other words, they might have to **advertise** it.

As a sysop, there are many things you can do to support the Apple II. First, if you're running a pirate BBS, **go clean**. Pirating has absolutely no place in the Apple II community. Also, everyone who is a sysop (or just a user) should find out who else in their neighborhood owns an Apple II. Get them to buy a modem, if they don't already have one. Introduce them to shareware, freeware, and the wealth of user-to-user support available for just the cost of a phone call. Show them what their computer is capable of doing. When users send you email for help with their computer, answer promptly and accurately. Give them all the information they need, or tell them how to get it easily. Go to your local schools and show them some of the new stuff that they probably don't know about (System 6.0 for example.) Go to your local Apple dealer and give him a copy of Modulae, which could be run on a demo unit to attract attention. Find your local Apple II user group, attend regularly and drum up enthusiasm for the Apple II. The bottom line is: Get Involved. Play an active role in supporting Apple II users. As a sysop, you are an important figure in the Apple II community. Make something of that. [IIS]

Networking on The Apple II
A Look at How it Works and How it Got Started

By DOUG GRANZOW

Lately it seems like the big thing in Apple II Bulletin Board Systems is the ability to network. Sysops everywhere are jumping on the opportunity to join networks to connect with other systems around the world.

In this article, we'll explain the basic principles behind networking and look at some of the networking options available to Apple II sysops.

The popularity of networking exploded a few years ago when the L&L Productions BBS began networking with a (now-defunct) BBS in Washington, DC. The network, called ProLink, was a fairly primitive process; much of the networking was done manually. Messages were captured from one BBS and posted onto the other. A "tagline" at the bottom of each message identified which BBS the message originated from. Email replies to messages on networked message bases were not allowed: Since the system knew the poster's user number but not his source BBS, it couldn't tell whether to send it to user "un" on L&L or user "un" on the Washington BBS, so the email reply function was simply disabled. ProLink involved manually entering a command to pack messages into a file, manually calling the other BBS and uploading the files, and someone on the other end manually entering a command to unpack the messages and post them. This network didn't last long (maybe in part due to trademark concerns; the word "ProLink" looks almost like "ProLine"), and the software to make it possible was never released to the public.

This "teaser" network motivated several sysops, myself included, to start developing their own networking software for GBBS. I'm not the best programmer in the world; so I dropped out of the race rather quickly. (No more than perhaps three people have ever even heard of G.E.L., the name of my planned network.) A few other

sysops were, however, able to put together packages that would automatically pack and unpack messages, keeping track of where they were from and where they had to go, but the sysop still had to manually call the other system to upload the packed messages.

The problems that were preventing a fully automatic network were twofold. First, the modem drivers used by GBBS do not make it easy to communicate with the modem. When the modem is not connected to a remote system, GBBS will not allow you to send any data to the modem, and even though GBBS has problems hanging up sometimes, it's hard to fool it into thinking there is a connection when you need to talk to the modem. This made it impossible to dial out to another system within GBBS. The other problem was stopping at a particular time to net-work. On Fido systems, for example, all systems go into network mode at a certain hour. They don't accept user logons -- only network calls. That hour is in the early morning, when few users will want to call and when long distance tele-phone rates are cheapest. With GBBS though, if the system is waiting for a call, there's no way to have it stop at a particular time in order to perform other functions.

Before long, though, someone wrote a binary USE file which replaced the modem(0) command and kept track of the time. The modem(0) command tells ACOS to spin the cursor in the upper corner of the screen and wait for a call. By replacing **modem(0)** in the source code with **use "b:acos.alarm","05:00:00 AM"**, (the actual syntax is a bit more complicated) ACOS would wait for a call as normal, but would check the current time against the inputted time (5 AM in the example code above) and, when it got a match, it would link to the networking routines. Now a network system could stop automatically to perform various tasks, but it still couldn't dial out.

It was Paul Parkhurst who was finally able to get a modem to dial while running ACOS. He did this with a binary USE file which he called "net.connect." With this routine, he was able to put together the first fully automatic networking system for GBBS. It's called Ogg-Net. (Don't ask what Ogg-Net means. It's not a fancy acronym like METAL or PLUSH or ACOS. It's pretty much just a name.) In Ogg-Net, each BBS in the network is classified as a "node," "hub," or "server." Every night, one by one, each node checks through its networked message bases for new messages, then packs those messages. It also checks the userlist; if it has changed it gets packed into a network file also. Same with any network email messages. Then the node calls its assigned hub. Once its hub recognizes it as another Ogg-Net BBS, the hub gives its "OK" to start sending files. The node transfers all of its network files to the hub, and then waits while the hub checks through all of its message bases and packs up the new messages. It also checks for mail going to the node BBS, for any userlists the node doesn't have, and for any nodelist updates that the node hasn't received yet. Then it sends all of these files to the node. Both systems hang up and begin distributing the network files they just received. The process is repeated almost identically when each hub system calls the server (there is only one server on the network).

Ogg-Net was designed to be a relatively small network, and it's been very successful. It currently has about 20 participating systems, about half in California. The topics carried range from GBBS support to religion, and each topic carries a fairly high volume of messages. The software sells for fifty dollars.

There was another GBBS add-on, called Fruity-Dog, which enabled a GBBS to become part of FidoNet. However, repeated attempts to contact Third Stone Software, which published Fruity-Dog, have led us to believe the company is no longer in business. Unfortunately, then, the software is no longer available.

GBBS sysops may think they have something unique here -- the only networked Apple II BBSes. But networking has actually been available on the Apple II since 1984. ProLine, which has never quite reached the level of popularity once enjoyed by GBBS, supports a highly versatile network to exchange posts, email, and files. ProLine systems not only network with other ProLines, but they can also exchange information with thousands of computer systems around the world through the Internet.

(Internet is a vast network of government, business, and school computers. It's probably safe to say that most of them are running some form of UNIX. Sites that are directly connected to Internet can offer features such as FTP, which allows a user to remotely logon to another Internet system and download files, or IRC, which allows several users from different sites to engage in a live conversation, much like the "CB Simulators" found on online services such as GEnie. However, since ProLine systems are not directly connected, these services are not available to users of ProLine systems. The costs, including a very expensive dedicated line, are too prohibitive for most sysops.)

The ProLine network is more free-form than Oggnet. Any ProLine can connect directly to as many other ProLines as the sysops wants (or can afford -- long distance bills can add up quickly!) and by registering their sites by submitting a standardized map entry, sysops will receive a "paths" file which lists the best (shortest and least expensive) routes to get data from one system to another. ProLine automatically uses this paths files to optimize all network traffic.

The newest entry in the Apple II networking scene is FutureVision. Many systems running FutureVision software are part of the network called FutureNet. The network is fully automatic, and fairly easy for the sysop to set up. When we last checked on FutureNet, major software revisions were being made to make it more compatible with other networks. This means you may be seeing FutureVision sites on Internet soon. Since the network is undergoing these changes as I write this, I won't bother to go into detail on how it works, since what I say could end

up being wrong by the time you read it.

An important consideration are the costs involved. Your computer will be making daily long distance phone calls to exchange messages and mail. (By using MCI's Friends And Family, interstate domestic US calls are about nine cents per minute, but both ends have to be MCI customers and you have to tell MCI you want the twenty percent discount when you call that number.) You'll probably want to upgrade to a 9600 bps or faster modem if you haven't already, and since none of the networking programs I've talked about actually compress data, you'll want a modem with data compression (either MNP 5 or v.42bis) built-in.

So what's in the future for networking? Clearly it is becoming increasingly popular. The most-read newsgroup on Internet is read by over 100,000 people. According to some estimates, Internet is doubling in size about once every two years. The amount of information exchanged daily is massive (about 10 megabytes of messages are posted per day, not including email) and keeps getting bigger. There is a problem here: how can anyone possibly keep up? Just reading one newsgroup, comp.sys.apple2 (everything you ever wanted to know about the Apple II, and then some), easily takes over an hour a day. What if you also want to read comp.dcom.telecom (all about telephones), alt.-bbs (all about running a BBS), misc.jobs.offered (job offerings, mostly for computer-related jobs), rec.humor.funny (jokes), rec.arts.star-trek (actually this one was recently split into **five** different groups), and comp.risks (about possible dangers of computer use)? There are over 1000 different newsgroups, all containing discussion of a specific topic. The incredible size may turn some people off. If you are currently running a successful local BBS, joining a network may well cost you some of your most valuable users. When a BBS joins a network, it becomes a totally different system. Not necessarily better, not necessarily worse, but definately different. A sysop should certainly consider carefully the pros and cons of it all before making the decision to join a network.   [IIS]

READER MAIL

I would like to announce the first Shareware release of my BBS software, VM. VM runs under ModemWorks 2.5 (by the Morgan Davis Group) on an Apple IIe-enhanced or equivalent computer. VM is a linear BBS with separate message and file areas (up to 50 of each), unlimited mail files for user (subject to disk space), a simple yet powerful dot-command editor, and a host of sysop functions and abilities that make running a VM BBS a snap.

VM's home board, the Broken Blade BBS [+1 206 781 9424, 300-2400 bps], has been online since 1990; the current MD-BASIC version of VM has been running since September of 1991. VM is $20 Shareware, which will get you a 3.5" disk with the latest version of te software (users must supply their own registered copy of ModemWorks 2.1), a lifetime of free upgrades, and extensive technical support. The shareware archive will be available on comp.binaries.apple2 and at Broken Blade in the first half of February 1992.

Mike Owen

Thanks for the information. VM is now also available on The II Sysops BBS.

II Sysops would like to hear from you! Published letters earn the writer one free issue of the newsletter. Send your letters to: *II Sysops*, P.O. Box 720, Eldersburg, MD 21784. Please mark them as "For Publication." If you would like to write a full-length article (worth a full-year subscription!), please contact us about writing guidelines, formatting, etc. Comments, complaints, questions, tips for other readers, or anything else -- send them in!

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